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On the whole, we consider both the works, which have drawn from us this short notice, well adapted to the end for which they were intended ; and the latter is a decided improvement upon the stereotype edition, which had gained very widely the favor and confidence of the public.

ART. X.—*Specimens of American Poetry, with Critical and Biographical Notices.* In Three Volumes. 12mo. By SAMUEL KETTELL. Boston. S. G. Goodrich & Co. 1829.

‘*Tout ce qui n’est pas prose est vers.*’ Mr Kettell seems to have thought, that the proper translation of this maxim of the philosopher is, that all which is not prose is *poetry*. He has accordingly filled more than a volume with measured lines, which have just as much claim to be called poetry, as metre or rhyme can confer on them, and no more. It is a cause of regret, that a collection, which professes to be selected from the works of American poets, should have been made upon such a principle ; for we think it rather worse to have produced bad poetry than none at all. As for the idea advanced in the preface, that ‘everything published among us must have some value, if not on account of its intrinsic merits, at least as affording some insight into the spirit and temper of the times, and illustrating the degree of social and mental improvement in the community,’ it is a doctrine we cannot agree to. It matters very little at what period, or by whom bad poetry was written, and we should hope that it would be set down as characteristic of nothing but the individual taste and skill of the author. Thus it adds nothing, but the reputation of bad taste and judgment to that for sanctity, which was enjoyed by John Eliot, the Indian Apostle, that he aided and abetted in making a wretched version of the Psalms of David ; and Cotton Mather’s punning elegies indicate nothing more, we hope, than his irresistible propensity.

Mr Kettell quotes the following extract from the ‘Bay Psalm Book,’ which was published at Cambridge in the year 1640, and was the first *book* printed in the English Colonies, although an *Almanac* and the *Freeman’s Oath* had been printed at Cambridge the year before.*

*The first book printed in the NEW WORLD was at Mexico, in the year 1544, entitled *Doctrina Christiana para los Indios*.

PSALM CXXXVII.

- ' 1. The rivers on of Babilon,
there when wee did sit downe,
Yea even then wee mourned when
wee remembered Sion.
2. Our harp wee did hang it amid,
Upon the willow tree,
3. Because there they that us away
led in captivitee
Requir'd of us a song, and thus
ask't mirth us waste who laid,
Sing us among a Sion's song,
unto us then they said.
4. The Lord's song sing can wee ? being
in strangers land, then let
5. loose her skill my right hand if I
Jerusalem forget.
6. Let cleave my tongue my pallate on
if minde thee doe not I,
if chiefe joyes o're I prize not more
Jerusalem my joy.
7. Remember Lord, Edoms sons' word,
unto the ground said they,
it rase it rase, when as it was
Jerusalem her day.
8. Blest shall hee bee that payeth thee
daughter of Babilon,
who must be waste, that which thou hast
rewarded us upon.
9. O happie hee shall surely bee
that taketh up, that eke
thy little ones against the stones
doth into pieces breake.'

We should hope this specimen was not intended to convey an idea of the taste of the age in which it was written. Most readers will discover little in it, except the extreme deficiency of the poetical gift in the worthy Apostle to the Indians, and in Thomas Welde and Richard Mather, his coadjutors in this task of versification. It is but just, however, to give their own words in regard to the nature of their performance. 'If,' say they, 'the verses are not always so smooth and elegant as some may desire and expect, let them consider, that God's altar needs not our polishings, for we have respected rather a plain translation, than to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any

paraphrase, and so have attended to conscience rather than elegance, fidelity rather than poetry.'

The character of the earlier periods of the settlement of this country is to be sought in something else, and something better, than their attempts at poetical composition; and it is in vain to endeavor to give dignity and value to these by calling them characteristic of the age, or the people, among whom they appeared. Except that there is a prevailing tone of religious elevation in them, we discern nothing peculiar, or which distinguishes them from other specimens of inferior versification in the English language. And there is too little to make it of importance, even if the quality were better. Mr Kettell's researches have hardly discovered a half dozen writers in English verse, who were born in America previous to the eighteenth century, and a very short list brings us down to those who flourished in the latter half of that century. It was an age of religious enthusiasm, bold enterprise, and vigorous effort, and it should neither be asked nor expected of such an age to abound in examples of poetical talent. The succeeding half century was a period illustrated by the most noble and glorious struggle for liberty, that has yet adorned the annals of the world, and it requires but a cursory view of the versification of those times to perceive, that there is more in it of a spirit of freedom than of poetry. We do not mean that there are no exceptions; we wish to point out a general, not a universal rule; and to intimate, that the exceptions are so few and unimportant, as to be not worth contending for.

We should not claim for our forefathers an excellence, which they themselves would have condemned. The reputation of having written poetry is one which they can well spare, and which we should not be unreasonably ambitious to give them. They were employed in better avocations, and have given the world valuable lessons in more important arts, than that of poetry; and now, that successive generations have laid the broad foundation, and erected the firm superstructure of civil and religious liberty, it will be well for us and our descendents to add those lighter embellishments of the edifice, which alone are left for us to supply. There are very encouraging symptoms of the ability and disposition of our contemporaries to contribute their share, and the latter half of Mr Kettell's collection compares very favorably with the preceding. There is a great deal which is certainly not poetry, but there is also a large

proportion, which displays that brilliancy of imagination, fervor of feeling, delicacy of sentiment, and power of expression, which are essential ingredients in the first, and indeed in every class of poetry. We wish the collection had been confined to those pieces, which discovered one or more of these characteristics. It would have been smaller, to be sure, but we should have been much more proud of a single volume, containing only good poetry, than of this miscellaneous assortment in three volumes. Our American claims to the reputation of having written good poetry, would likewise have been less contested and less disputable, if that which is really valuable had been selected and separated with a more careful discrimination. We cannot, therefore, approve the plan of Mr Kettell, nor is his mode of executing it without its defects. He has undertaken to give critical and biographical notices of the authors from whom he has selected, and he has, with the assistance of some of his friends, furnished us with several that are valuable and interesting; but we are sorry to say, there are many others that are miserably meagre, and betray an inexcusable carelessness and inattention. Charles C. Beaman, for instance, is dismissed with two words, 'Of Boston'; R. H. Wilde with two lines, and many others in a similar style of biography and criticism. If the life were too short to afford materials for biography, and the poetry too poor to be criticized, it would, to say the least, have been quite as well to omit the name and the rhymes altogether. There are others of whom Mr Kettell has given us very little either of criticism or information, who are much better poets than some to whom he has dedicated many pages of remark and extracts. Another error, as we think, is the insertion of many pieces, which were written for the 'poet's corner' of a newspaper, and which are much better adapted to such a distinction, than to the more elevated place they now hold in a collection of American poetry.

It is not surprising, that a few should have escaped the editor's notice, who have claims of a higher character. It would be unreasonable to expect, that the first attempt to form a list of all the American poets should be perfect, and we gladly bestow on Mr. Kettell the praise of industry and care in this part of his labor. We can forgive him for omitting one or two names, that we could remind him of, much more easily than we can for inserting several, upon whose productions we are very unwilling the national reputation should rest. It is to be

expected, and indeed desired, that specimens of works of very various merit should be exhibited in such a collection as this ; but Mr Kettell has been much too indulgent ; and has honored with the name of poet many, whose claims are very doubtful ; and some who are totally destitute of any such pretension.

After making every deduction, however, which the duties of our critical character require of us, there is much remaining which would be honorable to any literature, much which we are proud to claim as the production, not only of our countrymen and countrywomen, but of our contemporaries and friends. We cannot, of course, go through these volumes, and give our opinion of every writer, but there are one or two general remarks, which we shall state before we proceed to illustrate what we have advanced. In the first place, the proportion of female writers will be found to be uncommonly large, and it is nothing more than is due to them to say, that some of the best poetry we have to exhibit is from their fair hands. It is almost needless to express our pleasure at this fact, but we cannot refrain from observing upon its beneficial tendency. The influence of the female character is everywhere important, but nowhere more so than in the effect it has upon literature ; and we feel confident, that the elevation and purity of woman will be shown among us, not merely in the productions of her mind, but in their effect upon those of the other sex. Nay, they are already shown ; we do not remember to have seen anything in this whole collection, which could raise a blush upon the cheek of purity, or excite a wrong wish or idea in the bosom of innocence. It would be difficult to select three volumes, of such a size, from the literature of any other people, of which so much might be said ; and when it is considered, that this comprises a very large proportion of all the poetical literature of the nation, we may safely set it down as a fair specimen of the whole in this respect. It is a characteristic of which we may well be proud, and which we must attribute, in great part, to the important influence of the better half of our species. The number of female poets of a high order is also one among many proofs of the respect in which the sex is held, and the excellence of the education which they receive. It shows that they are partners in all that is good or agreeable in life ; that they are treated, neither like inferiors, nor like playthings and idols, but are invited to participate in everything that is honor-

able, and stimulate our efforts in all that is praiseworthy. That country must be rapid in its advance towards excellence, where a high standard of character is required and sustained by the delicate and fair portion of its inhabitants.

Another remark was forcibly suggested to us on looking over the list of authors. The number of persons, who are devoted to letters as an occupation among us, is exceedingly small. Our literature is composed principally of the efforts of the leisure hours of men, who are actively engaged in the serious professions and business of life ; of those whom we often see in the pulpit, at the bar, or in the counting-room ; of men who might be expected to be wholly engaged in things far removed from the light play of fancy, and the charms of elegant composition. It is well when the relaxations of such men are of a character to do honor to their country and themselves ; and it gives us no faint hope of our attaining a rank in literature corresponding to that, which we hold in our political and commercial relations, when we observe the strong and widely prevailing desire among us for literary distinction. Every feeling of the human heart has such free exercise, and is so fully developed in this country, that excessive activity and over production are now the universal cry of our political economists. It is a complaint which would not be without cause in literature. We really have apprehensions from the rising flood of publications of every description, and unless it be checked by the barriers, which the good sense and criticism of the public may raise around it, we shall probably be overwhelmed with an abundance that will prove neither useful nor agreeable. We have already expressed our opinion, that Mr Kettell is by far too indulgent, and we cannot but hope, that some severer critic will undertake a task similar to the one he has attempted, and give us a collection of American poetry in the highest and best sense of the word. That there is such will not be doubted by those who have attended to the subject, or have looked into Mr Kettell's collection ; and it is but necessary to mention the names of Bryant, Percival, Halleck, Hillhouse, Mrs Sigourney, Mrs Hale, Charles Sprague, and a few others, to give an idea of the dignity, grace, purity, and sublimity, which may be found among our authors, and of which we wish to see a collection uncontaminated by the bad taste, the dulness, or the bombast, displayed by too many who are called writers of poetry. The names we have mentioned are too familiar to

the readers of poetry among us to need quotation. We shall extract one or two pieces, which may be less known, but not undeserving of praise. Mr Kettell merely informs us of Milton Ward, that 'he published a volume of poetry at Hanover, New Hampshire, in 1826. Most of it was composed at the age of fifteen. The following is one of his earliest pieces.' If it be true, that the *Lyre* was written by a boy of fifteen, it displays a mind of uncommon promise. We have not often seen a pleasanter exercise of the fancy, or a specimen of more graceful and easy versification.

' THE LYRE.

' THERE was a Lyre, 't is said, that hung
High waving in the summer air ;
An angel hand its chord had strung,
And left to breathe its music there.
Each wandering breeze, that o'er it flew,
Awoke a wilder, sweeter strain,
Than ever shell of Mermaid blew
In coral grottoes of the main.
When, springing from the rose's bell,
Where all night he had sweetly slept,
The zephyr left the flowery dell
Bright with the tears that morning wept,
He rose, and o'er the trembling lyre,
Waved lightly his soft azure wing ;
What touch such music could inspire !
What harp such lays of joy could sing !
The murmurs of the shaded rills,
The birds, that sweetly warbled by,
And the soft echo from the hills,
Were heard not where that harp was nigh.
When the last light of fading day
Along the bosom of the west
In colors softly mingled lay,
While night had darkened all the rest,
Then, softer than that fading light,
And sweeter than the lay, that rung
Wild through the silence of the night,
As solemn Philomela sung,
That harp its plaintive murmurs sigh'd
Along the dewy breeze of even ;
So clear and soft they swell'd and died,
They seem'd the echoed songs of heaven.

Sometimes, when all the air was still,
 And not the poplar's foliage trembled,
 That harp was nightly heard to thrill
 With tones, no earthly tones resembled.
 And then, upon the moon's pale beams,
 Unearthly forms were seen to stray,
 Whose starry pinions' trembling gleams
 Would oft around the wild harp play.
 But soon the bloom of summer fled—
 In earth and air it shone no more ;
 Each flower and leaf fell pale and dead,
 While skies their wintry sternness wore.
 One day, loud blew the northern blast—
 The tempest's fury raged along—
 Oh ! for some angel, as they pass'd,
 To shield the harp of heavenly song !
 It shriek'd—how could it bear the touch,
 The cold, rude touch of such a storm,
 When e'en the zephyr seem'd too much
 Sometimes, though always light and warm.
 It loudly shriek'd—but ah ! in vain—
 The savage wind more fiercely blew ;
 Once more—it never shriek'd again,
 For every chord was torn in two.
 It never thrill'd with anguish more,
 Though beaten by the wildest blast ;
 The pang, that thus its bosom tore,
 Was dreadful—but it was the last.
 And though the smiles of summer play'd
 Gently upon its shattered form,
 And the light zephyrs o'er it stray'd,
 That lyre they could not wake or warm.'

VOL. III. pp. 340, 341.

George P. Morris, the editor of the 'New York Mirror and Ladies' Literary Magazine,' has written a pretty and delicate piece, well adapted to grace the pages of a ladies' magazine, and we believe it will not be thought out of place in our own.

'WOMAN.

'AH!—woman—in this world of ours,
 What gift can be compared to thee?
 How slow would drag life's weary hours,
 Though man's proud brow were bound with flowers,
 And his the wealth of land and sea,

If destined to exist alone,
 And ne'er call woman's heart his own.
 My mother!—at that holy name,

 Within my bosom there's a gush
 Of feeling, which no time can tame,
 A feeling which, for years of fame,

 I would not, could not crush,
 And sisters!—they are dear as life—
 But when I look upon my WIFE,

 My life-blood gives a sudden rush,
 And all my fond affections blend,
 In mother—sisters—wife—and friend.

Yes, woman's love is free from guile,

 And pure as bright Aurora's ray—

The heart will melt before its smile,

 And earthly passions fade away.

Were I the monarch of the earth,

 And master of the swelling sea,

I would not estimate their worth,

 Dear woman, half the price of thee.' VOL. III. p. 351.

We are strongly tempted to extract Mrs Hale's 'Light of Home,' and 'The Gifts,' but we must content ourselves with referring our readers to them as specimens of just and delicate feeling, and conclude our quotations with the following stanzas by Mr Pierpont. We think them among the best for the occasion, which has called forth so many verses.

' INDEPENDENCE.

' DAY of glory ! welcome day !

Freedom's banners greet thy ray ;

See ! how cheerfully they play

 With thy morning breeze,

On the rocks where pilgrims kneel'd,

On the heights where squadrons wheel'd,

When a tyrant's thunder peal'd,

 O'er the trembling seas.

God of armies ! did thy " stars

In their courses " smite his cars,

Blast his arm, and wrest his bars

 From the heaving tide !

On our standard, lo ! they burn,

And, when days like this return,

Sparkle o'er the soldier's urn,

 Who for freedom died.

God of peace !—whose spirit fills
 All the echoes of our hills,
 All the murmurs of our rills,
 Now the storm is o'er ;—
 O, let freemen be our sons ;
 And let future Washingtons
 Rise, to lead their valiant ones,
 Till there's war no more.

By the patriot's hallow'd rest,
 By the warrior's gory breast,
 Never let our graves be press'd
 By a despot's throne ;
 By the pilgrims' toil and cares,
 By their battles and their prayers,
 By their ashes,—let our heirs
 Bow to thee alone.'

VOL. II. pp. 270, 271.

We cannot refrain from mentioning, in the language of enco-mium, the *Shakspeare Ode*, by Charles Sprague. It shines, in this collection, unrivalled for brilliancy, variety, and power. There are, indeed, few lyrical compositions equal to it.

One of the best parts of Mr Kettell's work is the very full catalogue of American poetry at the end of the third volume. Whoever examines it will have no doubt of the fertility of our poetical soil, nor of the increasing rapidity of its production.

ART. XI.—*Memoir of De Witt Clinton, with an Appendix containing numerous Documents illustrative of the principal Events of his Life.* By DAVID HOSACK, M. D. F. R. S. New York. 1829. 4to. pp. 530.

THE work of Dr Hosack is a handsome quarto volume of five hundred pages and more, one hundred and thirty-five of which are occupied with a Memoir of Governor Clinton, and the remainder, being an appendix, printed in a smaller type, comprises a collection of documents illustrative of the events of Mr Clinton's life, accompanied by a map of the Erie and Northern Canals with the adjacent territory, and miniature prints of the heads of some of the most active promoters of the great works of internal improvement in New York. The work appears to be a tribute of friendship, as well as an inte-